

Over the past several years, there has been a great deal of controversy over embryonic stem cell research and whether it should be federally funded. Proponents of this research have argued that it could lead to cures for a variety of debilitating diseases, such as paralysis and Alzheimer's disease. But embryonic stem cell research has raised profound moral questions, because extracting the stem cell requires the destruction of a living human embryo. For this reason, I have opposed federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, but have supported alternative methods of stem cell research that do not require the destruction of an embryo.

Several weeks ago, two teams of scientists reported that they had discovered a new way to create stem cells by adding four genes to a human skin cell. The resulting stem cells share the most important characteristic of embryonic stem cells, pluripotency -- the ability to transform into any of the more than 200 types of cells in the human body. Dr. Robert Lanza, a leading stem cell researcher, has described this discovery as "the biological equivalent of the Wright brothers' first airplane." This major breakthrough will allow America's scientists to proceed with life-saving medical research without compromising ethical principles. I believe Congress should take this opportunity to get beyond the contentious and emotional debate over embryonic stem cell research and express united support for these exciting new discoveries.